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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 GENEVA 001454

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/09/2015

TAGS: [PREF](#) [RW](#) [BY](#) [UNHCR](#)

SUBJECT: RWANDA/BURUNDI: LETTERS REFLECT RENEWED CONCERN AT UNHCR

REF: GENEVA 1380

Classified By: RMA Counselor Piper Campbell, reasons 1.4 b and d

1. (C) Summary: Following up on his immediate interest in Rwanda/Burundi (ref A), the incoming United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has written to the Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi expressing concern about their actions and intentions regarding Rwandan asylum seekers. UNHCR staff are extremely concerned about the situation on the ground and predict wide-scale refoulement may occur in the coming days. According to UNHCR officials reporting to a group of diplomats June 10, the GOB Minister of Interior stated that the GOB would take stronger action on the asylum seekers, and the Minister of Public Security said that his government contemplated muscular action ("nous mettrons du muscle") to return the asylum seekers to Rwanda. UNHCR is concerned that, with Burundi elections over and Rwanda fearful that renewed flight will derail the Gacaca process, a large-scale, forced repatriation may be imminent. HC-elect Guterres is now planning to travel to Uganda for World Refugee Day (June 20), with travel to Burundi and Rwanda to occur only if meetings with Chiefs of State appear to be possible. End summary.

2. (C) The June 10 briefing in Geneva was organized by UNHCR to cover a broad range of topics on refugee issues in Africa, including Sudan-Chad, Somalia, and Togo (septel). However, UNHCR invited participants to raise questions on any issue, evoking a request for an update on the current situation of Rwandan asylum-seekers who have fled to Burundi since April. UNHCR reviewed the sequence of recent events, highlighting developments over the past two days: a letter from High Commissioner Elect Guterres to Presidents Kagame and Ndayizeye, presence of armed soldiers at Songore camp on June 8, and blunt talk by Burundi's Minister of Public Security.

3. (C) USMission subsequently saw a copy of the June 8 letter, in which Guterres stated that it is in the interest of all concerned that the joint Rwanda-Burundi sensitization campaign be replaced by a UNHCR effort to provide "detailed information to the asylum seekers about the situation in Rwanda" and promote "confidence building measures to enable them to make informed decisions." He also attached a non-paper on "Steps to Address the Current Situation of Rwandan Asylum seekers in Burundi." See text at paragraph 6.

4. (C) UNHCR Geneva also reports that on June 8 its staff at Songore Transit Center left the camp in response to intimidating force exhibited by armed soldiers (nationality not specified). They report that one local staffer was arrested but later released. Despite the display of force, the Burundi Red Cross later reported that no asylum seekers had been taken back to Rwanda that day.

5. (C) According to sources in Geneva, UNHCR, OCHA and the DSRSG in Burundi briefed the Minister of Interior June 9 on the prior day's events at Songore. The Minister reportedly stated that the events were unacceptable, but confirmed that the GOB was taking "stronger actions." Later that day, the Minister of Public Security reportedly told UNHCR and the DSRSG that no person had been returned involuntarily and that Burundi was abiding by international conventions. However, he stated that the situation in Rwanda was stable and persecution was not occurring; that none of the asylum seekers would be granted refugee status in Burundi; and that he was of the opinion that most of them were fugitives from justice in Rwanda. He also said that the GOR had provided the GOB with a list of 400 suspected criminals and genocidaires and that the GOB would turn them over to the GOR. He reiterated that all must return to Rwanda and said that the GOB will inform UNHCR of its position regarding the asylum seekers after the June 10 GOB-GOR meeting in Muyenga.

6. (C) UNHCR Geneva expressed concern that the result of the Muyenga meeting will be instructions to it, from the GOB and GOR, to return the asylum seekers to Rwanda immediately. As UNHCR cannot and will not do that, they fear that a large-scale refoulement may be developing. Earlier expectations that the situation would defuse, they said, have been overcome by Burundi's apparent willingness to take stronger action now that municipal elections are over, and GOR "panic" that an exodus could derail the Gacaca process.

7. (C) Text of UNHCR Non-paper on "Steps to Address the

Current Situation of Rwandan Asylum seekers in Burundi" follows:

-- With the completion of the transfer of Rwandan asylum-seekers to Songore Transit Centre in Burundi, UNHCR will conduct a thorough verification and registration process, which will lead to more reliable information on the numbers and areas of origin of Rwandan asylum-seekers.

-- UNHCR's office in Burundi will conduct interviews with the asylum-seekers concerned to fully ascertain their reasons for fleeing Rwanda and their eventual reluctance to return. At the same time, UNHCR's office in Rwanda will gather more detailed information on the situation in the areas of origin of the asylum-seekers in order to determine the validity of these claims. Any concern which may arise in the monitoring of the situation and which may require the attention and possible intervention of the Rwandan authorities will be shared with them.

-- In pursuance of UNHCR's mandate to seek durable solutions for person of concern, UNHCR will be actively involved in sharing objective information on the situation in Rwanda with the asylum-seekers, and in engaging in a positive dialogue on their possible return. For those asylum-seekers who wish to return voluntarily to Rwanda, UNHCR will facilitate their return movement, and provide individual targeted assistance upon return, as required. For this purpose, and in the spirit of confidence building, UNHCR's office in Rwanda will strengthen its returnee monitoring capacity.

-- Taking into consideration the urgency and importance of the matter, the teams on the ground will be reinforced to undertake the above steps. Both offices concerned have been requested to closely coordinate their activities in this respect.

-- UNHCR proposes the convening of a tripartite meeting at an appropriate level between the Governments of Rwanda and Burundi and UNHCR to discuss the situation in further detail.  
Moley